

# NESS INFORMATION SERVICE

## NESSLETTER 150

### APRIL 2006

#### RIP'S PIECE

I set the heading for this Nessletter in January, although I did type February, because I knew it would be that when I finished it. I am now running out of April and I am still struggling to finish it. I was going to ask, 'where does the time go?', but I do have the answer. Since retiring a few years ago, although I still do the occasional school taxi run, I have settled into a quiet, fairly sedentary life, looking after the house, the garden and of course 'pottering', I could 'potter' for Britain. Sometimes I think, how did I fit work in? Getting up before five in the morning and being at work ready to go underground for six, may have a great deal to do with it! That shift saw me home about half past two, with the rest of day to myself, for family and other things. Back shift was two till ten, which gave me the mornings, and took care of evenings. Night shift, ten till six, I handled as the opposite of days, working through the night, going to bed in the morning, rising about two with afternoon and evening before leaving for work. Looking back over that part of my life, I suppose work fitted in rather well, kept the bank manager happy and enabled me, that should be us, as Doris played a large part in everything, to raise our family and live in the beautiful area we do. With her health problems, gradually becoming worse over recent, and not so recent, years, I have become more responsible for looking after us. Which I believe I have said before, takes up much of my time, or I allow it to, because I potter. Also I find my attention span, never that good, seems to have shortened, so tasks become elongated taking much longer than they really should. Living deep in the country-side, the North Pennines, means there is always something to be watched outside, birds, animals, sheep, cows, the river, the hillside, the sky, the world passing by at a distance. Yes, I think I have the answer to the question, 'where does the time go?' Which does not really help you, our NIS members, most of whom I now consider friends, good friends. Then there comes the writing, as I am doing now. The attention span and memory do not help here. I can spend long moments trying to recall the word, I know it, which will give the precise meaning, or weight, to a particular sentence. Then my haphazard filing can take more valuable time. I wish to make reference to something, but need the correct details which I know I have, but where? Time is then spent delving in various folders and heaps of paper, looking for the letter or article. Time which would be better spent putting more words onto paper! So the Nessletters take me longer and longer to complete, and all you good members out there wonder what on earth is happening. I regularly promise myself that I will make more effort, that I will concentrate, I will complete an issue quickly, I will provide you with what you require. Then the things that I should have been doing while writing, get done, slowly, and another great chunk of time has passed by. The road to Hell being paved with good intentions, and all that.

#### OBITUARIES

Among the many people who have died in the last year, I have noted three who have a Loch Ness connection.

Frank Searle is a name which will register with most who have an interest in Loch Ness. He can be viewed from almost diametric opposites, to some he was a dedicated monster hunter who over his years at the loch obtained many photographs of the monster. To others he was nothing more than a charlatan, a hoaxer, who tried to emphasise his own importance and contribution to the hunt, and who's photographs were nothing more than fakes; not very good ones at that. Frank died on 26<sup>th</sup> March '05 aged 84. I struggled with the 'died', trying to think of a watery version of 'shuffled of the mortal coil', all that came to mind was 'finally submerged', which did not really catch the mood. Born in Middlesex in 1921, Frank always stressed his childhood in the East End of London, then his eighteen years as a regular soldier. He said he had joined, at 14, straight from school. Then there were the veiled references to the SAS, and anti-terrorist operations in, what was then Palestine. Whatever the circumstances, it seems he had a service pension when he returned to civilian life. He told me that his parents had been green grocers and fruiterers, while he worked in a similar capacity. After reading Constance Whyte's 'More Than A legend' in the late '50s, he took his holidays, camping at Loch Ness. It was while on one of these holidays, in June 1965, that he claims his first sighting. He was with a small group of hitch-hikers near Invermoriston, when they saw a large hump. He returned to the loch for his

holidays for the following three years. He always returned to London feeling frustrated, not only that he had not seen any more of the monster, but that the holidays were over just too quickly. It was during this time that he began seriously to consider remaining at the loch-side permanently. In June 1969 he pitched his tent on the camp-site at Balachladaich Farm, he was to live by the loch until December '83. At the close of the camping season, Hugh Ayton, the farmer, allowed Frank to set up permanent camp in the woods some way along the loch side from the licensed campsite. The Ayton's proved to be very accommodating to Frank, as he did not have a vehicle. They would take him into Inverness with them to get his weekly shopping and other things. At that time Frank was almost secretive about his activities, he certainly did not advertise his presence. Over at Achnahannet, the Loch Ness Investigation HQ, there were rumours that someone was camping along the Dores shore, monster watching, but that was about all. When I first visited Frank in '70 he was very snugly settled in. The tent was large, with a sheet of industrial clear polythene overall, as an extra fly-sheet. All surrounded by a substantial wall of bracken, gorse, bramble and other material, providing a very good wind-break, under the trees. Inside it was furnished with carpet, bed, table, chairs, cooker and other bits and pieces. At that time, to my recollection, Frank's stated intention was to 'see the monster', in the early days I am not too sure if he even had a camera, that came a little later. I also asked him how he was able to afford to live there, even in the very quiet manner he did. He told me he had an army pension, also a small income from investments, from the proceeds of the sale of his parent's business. They had passed away some time ago.

When his presence was established by the LNI, he was approached by David James, one of the LNI directors, and offered the use of one of their 33mm movie cameras with telephoto lens. That would seem a reasonable offer, but there was a stipulation, Frank was asked to sign a waiver document handing the rights of any film he took, over to the LNI. This was standard practice with all the LNI personnel and volunteers. He would have none of that, and told David in no uncertain terms what he could do with his camera and offer. It could be this was the beginning of his ongoing antagonism to the LNI, and then other groups working on the mystery over the years. I am sure he thought there was money being made from these expeditions, which there was not. The present exhibitions at Drumnadrochit, now that is another story. A small gate then appeared in the roadside fence, with a notice inviting passers-by down the narrow path to visit Frank Searle, Loch Ness Investigator. On 27<sup>th</sup> July '72 Frank got his first photograph of Nessie, showing two low humps and possibly a small fin. Although likened to a floating log, the picture was published in the papers, and Frank found himself the centre of attention. Over the next four years Frank produced some 20 photographs. There were humps, two humps joining together, humps with looping necks attached, upright thin necks, head and neck with open mouth, and so on. I say produced because it became very clear that the 'Searle Photographs' were fakes. When carefully investigated it was apparent these photographs owed much to, fence posts, pieces of tarpaulin, oil drums, rubber gloves, and of course a picture postcard of a Brontosaurus (Nessletter 17 Aug '76). He managed three Nessie photographs from the single postcard. His accounts of where, when, and how such photographs were taken did not always tally. There is one, of head and neck, said to be taken at 6.15am 19<sup>th</sup> July '74, which shows a clear morning with the far shore in full view. We were camping within half a mile of the supposed spot, and on that morning there was thick fog with visibility under 50 yards.

A question to be asked is 'why'? When first at the loch, Frank seemed a genuine person only interested in furthering the investigation. Why did he produce fake photographs? There is money, of course, he was paid £25 by the Daily Record for a Nessie picture. That would buy groceries for a couple of weeks. There would be extra cash for interviews and the use of the pictures by other papers. However I think the money was a minor part of the situation. I would suggest pride, (is that the correct word?), he had been at the loch-side for three years and had nothing to show for it. Then when he realised the fame, and attention, that such pictures brought, he was hooked. He began to have fairly frequent sightings, which of course were accompanied by photographs!! In the press he acquired the reputation of the successful Nessie hunter, which led to increased numbers of visitors. In late '74 he had problems with the local planning people and had to leave his camp at Balachladaich, spending the winter in a caravan on the Black Isle. Also by now his photos had been debunked by different authors in a number of publications. March '75 saw him installed in a caravan, with his lean-to exhibition in a field below Boleskine House, next to the cemetery. He had become very possessive about the loch by now, and was increasingly bitter about the more scientific and professional work being done by others, such as the Loch Ness Project and the Academy of Applied Sciences. This antagonism eventually led to things like the daubing of anti-Adrian Shine graffiti on Urquhart Castle, and a petrol bomb throwing incident at the Project's loch-side camp. Before that however, in '76 Frank scuppered himself by publishing a book 'Nessie;

seven years in search of the monster'. The book had only one printing, as it was pointed out to the publishers that the monster photographs were faked and large sections of the book, dealing with fishing, were plagiarised. I think publishing the book may have indicated his state of mind. Was he going over the edge, so arrogant or delusional that he believed no one would see the truth? Frank had one last move of location, going on to the quay side at Lower Foyers. He was there until December 1983, when he more or less disappeared. One of the rumours was he had gone to the West coast of Scotland, looking for Armada galleon wrecks (NIS61).

That was it for many years. In April '04 I was contacted by Andrew Tullis, asking for any information I may have about Frank Searle. He was researching Frank with the intention of making a TV documentary. I passed on the little I had, along with an address or two that might be helpful. I heard nothing more for many months, then Andrew rang again. He had located Frank, in a way. Acting on information received, as they say, Andrew had traced Frank to a flat in Fleetwood, Lancashire. When Andrew went to Fleetwood to see Frank, he found he had died four weeks earlier. He was told, Frank had lived there quietly for the previous eighteen years, for the last seven, he had been confined to a wheelchair after a stroke left him paralysed down his right side. A rather sad outcome, from the celebrity of his monster hunting days, to a quiet backwater in Fleetwood. He had no family, I hope he had friends to mourn him.

The Andrew Tullis documentary (The Man Who Captured Nessie) was screened on Channel 4 earlier this year. I found it interesting, I think he got the story just about right. Among those he had tracked down was a Belgian lady, who had been one of a string of 'girl Fridays' that Frank attracted. Her recollections were a different slant on the situation. At the time I am fairly certain that his fake photographs did some harm to the research at Loch Ness, surely putting off some of the scientific people that may have been interested. I think that effect may have diminished over the years. I was contacted by a younger NIS member who said she knew nothing of Frank, apart from his name. We also have members whose interest in Loch Ness had been sparked by Frank, but even when they learned of his deception continued their research, because they thought there was something worth following up. So perhaps his influence was not all bad.

Mark Chorvinsky founded 'Strange' magazine in 1987, he was also the editor, which ran to 20 copies in print, then appeared on-line. I understand he had completed number 23 a few months before his death. He succumbed to cancer on 16<sup>th</sup> July '05, at the early age of 51. I had exchanged Nessletters with him over the years, as well as other correspondence. As a youngster he became fascinated with many aspects of Fortean phenomena, as well as practising stage magic from the age of seven. Working for some years in his youth as a professional stage magician He was also interested in cinematic special effects, producing a short film in '83, 'Strange Tangents', which was shown at various film festivals. Some years later he made a number of short video documentaries about his Fortean investigations. In 1978 he founded a bookstore, 'Dream Wizards', in Rockville, Maryland. This led to him spending much time categorising the collected data of the International Fortean Organization. He became unhappy with the administration of the group, which was when he began to produce 'Strange'. He was interested in the Bigfoot saga and was among the first to discuss the role of Washington state construction magnate in the early events in 1958. When Jerry Crew found the first footprints to be ascribed to Bigfoot. He was very sceptical of the 1967 Patterson/ Gimlin Bigfoot footage, suspecting the clip was a hoax. He suggested that John Chambers, a Hollywood special effects award winner, was implicated. Chambers always denies such allegations. He was also critical of the Owl-man and Loch Ness work, and findings, of Tony 'Doc' Shiels, another magician. He felt obliged to unearth the truth of any mystery he investigated. At times this undermined long-held cherished beliefs, but he did not seem to gain any pleasure from presenting these views, feeling it just had to be done. He researched, and wrote about, many Fortean topics. Giving a double presentation at the Fortean Times' 1998 UnConvention on the impossible to find 'Thunder Bird' photograph and reported sightings of the 'Grim Reaper'. Mark had a critical eye for Fortean phenomena, which I feel is so important in an investigator. He leaves a wife and son and is a sad loss.

Dan Taylor is a name that many of our younger members may not immediately recognise, but link it to a 'Yellow Submarine' and his place in the Loch Ness story becomes apparent. Dan, an engineer, inventor and naval man died in Savannah, Georgia, on 25<sup>th</sup> July '05 at the age of 65. In 1958, aged 18, he joined the US Navy, attached to the anti-submarine division as a torpedo man. During the Korean war he served on destroyers and in submarines, leaving the service in 1963. He then joined the Perry Corporation, designing and building mini-submarines. In this capacity he was part of the team that helped to recover an H-bomb from the

Mediterranean. It had been accidentally dropped by an American B52 in what became known as the Palomares 'Broken Arrow' incident, in 1966. In civilian life his interest in submarines continued and he built one of his own, the 20 foot long 'Viperfish', in his garage. Some of the board of the Loch Ness Investigation Bureau undertook a lecture tour in the US looking for sponsorship for the 1969 season at the loch. They returned with funding from the World Book Encyclopaedia and the services of Dan Taylor and his, yellow, fibreglass, submarine. The LNIB volunteer crews would provide the manpower, when necessary, for launching, hauling ashore etc.. Dan arrived at the loch in July 1969, finding that 'Viperfish' was not really up to the task it was being asked to do. It was under-powered, making it slow and the lights fitted were not able to make much impression in the gloomy peat-stained water of the loch. He had equipped it with spear-guns firing biopsy darts, these had been developed by Professor Roy Mackal with the intention of taking a tissue sample from whatever lives in the loch. When first launched 'Viperfish' was far too buoyant and would not submerge, it needed much more ballast. After sorting out the various teething trouble, Dan undertook upwards of 50 dives in Loch Ness. One problem he never really managed to correct was the habit the hatch had of popping just as he got to the surface. The hatch was designed to fit from the outside, which makes sense, as the more pressure it is subjected to as you dive, the tighter the seal becomes. However Dan found that, for some reason, during a dive pressure in the hull built up slightly, causing the 'popping' as the surface was neared. This could happen with still some inches of water over the hatch, giving rise to some anxious moments as the water poured into the vessel. After trying to rectify this, without much success, Dan used to take an umbrella into the submarine when diving, so he could at least keep dry!! Although thinking about now, as I did then as I was at the loch for some of the time Dan spent there, that 'brolly' would not have been much use if the 'Viperfish' had been overwhelmed. Thankfully the time it came closest to that, it was unmanned, to begin with. Dan had usually taken 'Viperfish' down in Urquhart Bay sometimes getting to the bottom, but had not chanced it in the depths of the main loch. In September '69, towards the end of his stay at the loch, it had been decided to test the integrity of the fibreglass hull by lowering it into the deepest part of the loch. A motorised work barge, the 'Lochalsh' (I think), was hired from Inverness, it had a hand cranked winch and derrick system. Viperfish was towed out by the LNIB work-boat, 'Fussy Hen', to meet up with the barge mid-loch off the mouth of Urquhart Bay. Then began the long job of lowering, a suitably ballasted, 'Viperfish' into the depths and hoisting her up again. LNIB volunteers providing the muscle power. After some hours this had been achieved three times, and all seemed well. 'Lochalsh' was sent on it's way, after hitching the submarine onto 'Fussy Hen' for the tow back to Temple Pier, when it was noticed that she appeared to be in imminent danger of sinking. Wet-suited people scrambled to attach a compressed air-line to her, while Dan went aboard and proceeded to throw the rocks, used for ballast, out of the hatch. These measures worked and the submarine became buoyant again. Which was as well, because 'Fussy Hen' would have had no chance of holding the two ton weight on the end of the tow rope. Dan did not get a chance to try for a tissue sample, but he did experience one instance, when he was sure he was fairly close to something which was large enough to roll the submarine about, as it swam away at quite a speed. After his stint at Loch Ness, Dan and his wife Margaret ran a restaurant in Memphis, which was frequented by Elvis Presley's retinue. In 1995 Dan suffered a heart attack and a stroke. This left him blind in an eye and deaf in one ear. Perhaps spurred on by thoughts of failing health he began building a new submarine. With a length of 44 feet and a 500 horsepower motor, taken from an electric locomotive, which would give a speed of 20 knots, he had designed it specifically for the conditions in Loch Ness. To be named 'Nessa', a Celtic Goddess, it had much stronger lights with an improved tissue sampling system. Dan also planned to install side-scan sonar and video and infrared cameras. It is now a few years since word of this project was first published, because despite putting a large amount of his own money into it, he really needed substantial sponsorship. Sadly this project was far from completion when he died in July'05, due to complications from surgery. I had met Dan briefly in '69, and remember an enthusiastic, yet quiet, gentleman. Although he was only at Loch Ness for a few months, Dan, with his Yellow submarine, truly earned his position in the annals of the Loch Ness mystery. A sad loss.

At long last NIS150 finally put together. As usual thank you for being NIS members, also for your tolerance. If you have a change of address please let me know. Also please remember your news and views are always welcome and needed, subscriptions remain, UK, £3.00, the US, \$10.00. The address is still R.R.Hepple, 7 Huntshildford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel.01388 537359.

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